

Legitimizing Post-Fordism: A Critique of Anthony Giddens' Later Works

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Introduction

Although Anthony Giddens describes his approach as “social” rather than “critical” theory, and although there is little obvious Frankfurt School influence in his writing, he believes “social theory is inevitably critical theory.”¹ While he might aim at such a critical position, it is far from obvious that he succeeds. On the contrary, his later writings have become an apology for the *status quo*.² Failing to consider his prejudices, perhaps because he thinks critique is inevitable, Giddens has increasingly vindicated predominant relations of domination. He celebrates the rise of post-traditional individuals, who have the freedom of choice to create and

1. Anthony Giddens, *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 15.

2. Patrick Baert argues that Giddens' career comprises four periods: the first (the 1960s) includes his articles on suicide; the second (from the beginning to the middle of the 1970s) includes his writings on Marx, Durkheim and Weber; the third (from the middle of the 1970s until 1984 — the publication of the *The Constitution of Society*) includes his writings on structuration theory; and the fourth includes everything published in the late 1980s and 1990s. See *Social Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), pp. 92-4. This division is not without merit. But Giddens' structuration theory constitutes a distinct body of texts, published between the mid-1970s and 1984. Moreover, the first mention of “structuration” appears in *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies*, which Baert considers part of his early period. Dividing Giddens into an early and a later period, situating structuration theory at the end of his earlier period, is more straightforward, and reflects the similar concerns and style of Giddens' writing from the 1960s to 1984. The key division on which this paper is based, and on which it is in agreement with both Baert and Jeffrey Alexander's “Critical Reflections on Reflexive Modernization,” in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1996), is that there is a demonstrable divide in Giddens' writing after 1984.

re-create themselves, while reproducing the global system that has liberated them. His celebration of the individual echoes dominant free market principles, which privilege choice and consumption, and have been central to the post-Fordist transformations in the West.

Structuration Theory

Giddens' first serious works in the early 1970s examined the ways in which Marx, Weber and Durkheim can contribute to an the analysis of late 20th century society. Out of these works emerged a more focused theoretical interest in structure and agency and, from the mid-1970s onwards, his structuration theory sought to overcome the dualism of structure and agency through a synthesis of functionalism, structuralism and interpretivist traditions. Allegedly, functionalists like Parsons and structuralists like Levi-Strauss had overemphasized objective factors in social life, at the cost of the individual agent, while the interactionist and interpretive tradition, represented by Goffman and Garfinkel, did exactly the opposite, overestimating the importance of individual agents.

Structuration theory was meant to explain how social relations stretch across time and space to reproduce the social system through meaningful individual action.³ To that end, Giddens postulated the notion of "the duality of structure," whereby structure,⁴ consisting of "virtual" rules and resources orienting individual action, is both the medium and the outcome of individual actions.⁵ These virtual rules are problematic, but the role they play in structuration theory is important. When individuals act, they draw on these virtual rules to carry out certain social practices, thereby reproducing the rules which were the medium of their practice in the first place. Giddens illustrates this duality by the favored example of language use: "when I utter a grammatical English sentence in casual conversation, I contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole."⁶ For Giddens, individuals do not merely reproduce structure, the rules which

3. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 35.

4. The notion of structure originally arises in Giddens' work out of the concept of practical consciousness, which he distinguishes from either discursive consciousness or the unconscious. See Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 2. Whereas discursive consciousness refers to those areas of knowledge of which one is aware, and the unconscious refers to subconscious motivations, practical consciousness refers to the state of consciousness in which one ordinarily lives. This is captured best by Schutz' notion of the "taken-for-granted."

5. *Ibid.*, p. 9

6. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

inform action, but also the system of enduring social institutions, because the rules ensure the appropriate routines for the system's reproduction. By drawing on the rules appropriate to the institutions in which individuals find themselves, they reproduce those institutions. There is a duality, not only of structure (rules and resources), but also of the social system (institutions), where the system's properties become the medium and the outcome of individual action. "One of the main propositions of structuration theory is that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction (duality of structure)."⁷ Although, at first, it is only the rules that are reproduced in social practice, Giddens assumes that these rules are unproblematically connected to the wider system and, therefore, that the system is, more or less, automatically reproduced by individual practice.

For the most part, Giddens' structuration theory is concerned with the system's reproduction through individual practice, even though many of his critics wrongly argue that structuration theory ignores the social system.⁸ The centrality of the individual, however, does appear at certain moments. Having argued that the individual must be bound to the system through structure, Giddens insists that "it is a necessary feature of action that, at any point in time, the agent 'could have acted otherwise'."⁹ This contradicts the rest of structuration theory, which explicitly limits the randomness of individual action through "structure" and appears in Giddens' writing as an unfounded ideological assertion of Western liberal values.¹⁰ Thus, Mestrovic has argued that Giddens' appeal to the persistence of the free, autonomous individual in the face of the "juggernaut of modernity" is an act of optimistic bad faith, where Giddens, an optimistic modernist, refuses to accept the darker implications of modernity (which, in fact, he always recognizes).¹¹ For Mestrovic, Giddens cannot accept the implications of his own theory or the reality of modern society, which substantially curtail individual freedom. The subordinate individualist element in structurationist

7. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

8. See Alex Callinicos "Anthony Giddens: a Contemporary Critique" in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1985), pp. 133-166 and Margaret Archer "Morphogenesis versus Structuration: on Combining Structure and Action" in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 456-483.

9. Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

10. See Nigel Pleasants "Free to Act Otherwise? A Wittgensteinian Deconstruction of the Concept of Agency in Contemporary Social and Political Theory," in *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1998), pp. 1-28.

11. Stepjan Mestrovic, *Anthony Giddens: the Last Modernist* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 4, 23, 78 and 155.

theory becomes dominant in his later work, where the claim that individuals “could have acted otherwise” becomes the focus. As the liberated individual becomes central, Giddens himself becomes an apologist for post-Fordism.

Post-Fordism

By the mid-1970s, the Keynesian and Fordist systems of regulation and production were becoming obsolete. As the long post-war boom ended, the consumer market became saturated, multinationals became increasingly dominant, and Western states found themselves unable to manage the economy and to mediate between labor and capital. As Hayek argued, Keynesian efforts to sustain full employment stimulated inflation, which jeopardized the very jobs the state was meant to defend. The massive inflation caused by the 1972-73 oil crises rendered Fordism and Keynesianism unviable and, from the mid- to late-1970s, there was a move toward new post-Fordist regimes, at the forefront of which were Reaganite America and Thatcherite Britain.¹² Although it is dangerous to differentiate too sharply between this post-Fordist transformation and the Fordist era, there have been certain broad changes, which can be characterized as comprising four main elements. In terms of production, the post-Fordist era is marked by flexible specialization in increasingly dominant multinational corporations, although the extent of this shift has been debated.¹³ Politically, there has been a shift away from Keynesian management to neo-liberal *laissez-faire*, where state involvement in the economy has been reduced by deregulation and privatization.¹⁴ Socially, the key transformation has been the development of a one-third, two-thirds society, where notions of Keynesian universality have been rejected, since it has been recognized that an all but permanently unemployed underclass has become unavoidable.¹⁵ Culturally, there has been a shift

12. For general accounts of the Fordist and post-Fordist regimes and the transformation to post-Fordism, see Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds., *New Times* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

13. See Michel Piore and Charles Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

14. See David Marquand, *The Unprincipled Society* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1988); Andrew Gamble, *The Free Market and the Strong State* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds., *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983); Bob Jessop *et al.*, *Thatcherism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

15. See Linda McDowell, Philip Sarre and Chris Hamnett, eds., *Divided Nation* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1989); Will Hutton, *The State We're In* (London: Vintage, 1996); Ash Amin and Anders Malmberg, “Competing Structural and Institutional Influence on the Geography of Production in Europe.” in Amin, *Post-Fordism: A Reader*, *op.cit.*

away from a restrictive Protestant ethic toward hedonism and consumption.¹⁶ Individual choice has increasingly been emphasized in debates informing these four major transformations, as opposed to the corporatist solidarity dominant during the postwar period.

For Lash and Urry, “this accelerating individualization process is a process in which agency is set free from structure and it is a structural change itself in modernization that, so to speak, forces agency to take on powers that heretofore lay in the social structures themselves. . . . Structural change in the economy forces the individual to be freed from the structural rigidity of the Fordist labor process.”¹⁷ They highlight the fragmentation of the Fordist economy that has increased the numbers of individuals employed in the service industry, facilitating the consumption of symbolic goods concerned with the creation of identity, which, in light of class and gender decomposition, has become more negotiable. The development of elaborate post-Fordist markets has expanded the consumer choices of affluent individuals. Increasingly, economic and social policy, as well as personal social relations, have been justified by, and understood in terms of the sanctity of individual autonomy. Thus, although most modern post-Fordist countries are not the most individualistic, Western states increasingly deploy the rhetoric of the individual to justify post-Fordist transformations.¹⁸

The Later Giddens

Since 1987, Giddens’ concerns have shifted from the dense theoretical discussions of earlier periods, to a focus on the defining characteristics

16. See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), pp. 5 and 14; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

17. Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space*. (London: Sage, 1994), p. 5.

18. *Ibid.*, p.108. Lash and Urry overstate the point when they argue that “Anglo-American consumption is much more modern, individualized and reflexive than its Japanese and German counterparts,” when, in fact, the service orientation of the British and American economies should be interpreted not as a vindication of modernity, but rather as a testament to these nations’ uncompetitive manufacturing sectors. Nevertheless, their argument about the increasing individualization which occurs as a result of the development of these very sophisticated methods of “sign-value” marketing does reflect the direction of neoliberal, post-Fordist reforms. Nowhere is emphasis on the individual clearer than in the Thatcherite reforms of Britain in the 1980s, each of which was explicitly justified by appealing to the greater efficiency and equity of individual initiative and reward. Thatcher announced this new allegiance to the autonomous individual when she declared that “there is no such thing as society — only individuals and families.” See *The Times* (January 19, 1985).

of late modernity.¹⁹ For Giddens, modernity involves the disembedding of relations from local settings and their stretching across time and space. In light of new methods of communication, face-to-face relations of pre-modern societies have been replaced by long-distance relations.²⁰ This disembedding of relations has become a crucial feature of globalized, late or high modern society, as he calls it, and has produced new forms of risk and trust.²¹ Giddens has rejected many of the terms often applied to post-1970s society, such as post-industrialism, because, he argues, industry is still central to economic production, and postmodernism: the term refers to “aspects of aesthetic reflection” and exaggerates the rift with modern culture.²²

Giddens defines post-traditional society primarily by its opposition to a traditional one. Accordingly, a traditional society is characterized by a stifling allegiance to the past, which legitimates action and prevents change. In traditional society, guardians, who are seen to have sole access to truth, protect and sustain traditions.²³ Since modernity and late modernity are post-traditional societies, traditional societies are all those societies that have existed across the globe before the great European transformation of the 18th and 19th centuries.²⁴ Giddens does try to qualify this claim, writing that “in even the most traditional of societies not all things are traditional,”²⁵ but, although he concedes that no society is completely traditional,²⁶ he nevertheless insists that late modernity is the most radical social form and the least dependent on tradition. Yet, the notion of post-traditionalism is problematic. It is not even clear that late modernity is less traditional than other cultures for, as Giddens notes, traditions created by the Enlightenment and European Christian culture are still very influential.²⁷ Moreover, it is not clear that any society is traditional in the way he caricatures non-Western and pre-modern cultures. These cultures

19. Alexander has satirically called this “Giddens lite.” See Alexander, “Critical Reflections,” *op.cit.*, p.135. See also Mestrovic, *Anthony Giddens, op. cit.*, p. 149.

20. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 4.

21. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity, op.cit.*, p. 7.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6 and 150. Giddens has never employed, but also never dismissed, the term post-Fordism.

23. Anthony Giddens, “Living in a Post-Traditional Society,” in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, eds., *Reflexive Modernization* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), pp.75 and 84.

24. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity, op. cit.*, p. 4.

25. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity, op.cit.*, p. 80.

26. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity, op. cit.*, p. 48; *The Consequences of Modernity, op.cit.*, 37.

27. Mestrovic, *Anthony Giddens, op. cit.*, p. 2.

are also dynamic and critical, wherein tradition rarely, if ever, has the deadening effect Giddens assumes. At any rate, those practices taken to be immemorial are often only recent inventions conveniently mythologized by dominant groups.²⁸ Thus, any definition of society as traditional becomes problematic. Despite his qualifications of the idea of tradition, Giddens refuses to see that, in the end, they undermine reified appeals to tradition and post-tradition, which are essential to his later work. Societies cannot be meaningfully classified in this fashion, since the terms “tradition” and “post-tradition” merely formalize assertive, cursory understandings of the societies in question, without revealing anything of their organization and culture. The terms “traditional” and “post-traditional” conceal and legitimate cursory, even personal evaluations of past and present social forms.

There are serious difficulties with the term “post-traditionalism.” Its real significance, however, lies in the kind of individual it implies. This new individual is the core of Giddens’ later writings. “In many pre-modern contexts, individuals (and humanity as a whole) were more powerless than they are in modern settings. People typically lived in smaller groups and communities; but smallness is not the same as power. In many small-group settings individuals were relatively powerless to alter or escape from their surrounding social circumstances. The hold of tradition was more or less unchallenged.”²⁹ In post-traditional society, the individual is no longer committed to one tradition, nor restricted to ascribed social relations. Consequently, post-traditionalism facilitates the development of individual reflexivity. Since it is no longer obvious what individuals should do or be, they must consider their options and make choices about what they should do; they are truly “free to do otherwise.” Individuals must reconstitute their self-identity reflexively. “The more tradition loses hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of a dialectical interplay between local and global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options.”³⁰

No longer constrained by tradition, but now exposed to a vast array provided by global capitalism, individuals have to decide what kind of persons they will be. “The self is seen as a reflexive project, for which individuals are responsible. We are not what we are, but what we make

28. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

29. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, *op.cit.*, p. 192.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 5

of ourselves.”³¹ While much of Giddens’ work suggests that the emergence of this personal reflexivity is emancipatory, he does point out the negative side; i.e., that the emphasis on personal choice raises the problem of existential doubt and ontological insecurity.³² If personhood is no longer grounded in the authority of tradition, which “sequesters” all sorts of potentially dangerous practices, and gives life an automatic meaning,³³ then individuals must personally ground their lives. They have to quell existential doubt and to establish ontological security through the creation of personal routines. Late modernity facilitates the development of reflexivity by expanding the choices individuals can make, but this expansion of choice and loss of traditional authority also produces Durkheimian anomie.

Crucially, the arena in which individuals establish their identities is no longer work but lifestyle: “A lifestyle involves a cluster of habits and orientations, and hence a certain unity which is important to a continuing sense of ontological security and that connects options in a more or less ordered pattern.”³⁴ In late modernity, consumption becomes the key area of cultural meaning and individual expression. Although Giddens is oblique about the origins of this new primacy of consumption, it can be inferred from his writing. “In a post-traditional social universe, reflexively organized, permeated by abstract system in which the reordering of time and space realigns the local with the global, the self undergoes massive changes. Modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choice.”³⁵ Whereas, in traditional societies, patterns of consumption were more or less obvious and were created and sustained locally, the development of new forms of production and marketing have dissolved those local practices and have introduced new ones that originate elsewhere in the world, and the individual can now freely choose.

In light of this centrality of individual autonomy, Giddens rejects Keynesianism, which he sees faltering, because it “presumes a citizenry with more stable lifestyle habits than are characteristic of the globalized universe of high reflexivity.”³⁶ In this new world, the Keynesian direction of the economy, which sought to manipulate demand in line with collective

31. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-9 and 48-55.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-7.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

36. *Ibid.*, p.42.

interests and communal values, is untenable. In proposing a radical politics for this new post-Fordist era of expanded consumer choice, Giddens rejects Keynesian collectivism in favor of individual reflexivity and freedom of choice. This individualistic emphasis on freedom of choice becomes clearest when he discusses the emergence of a new form of sexuality as a central element in the self's new reflexive practices. According to Giddens, the sexuality of post-traditional society is distinguishable from former societies by the fact that sexual practices have become divorced from biological reproduction. Consequently, the uses of sexuality have been transformed.³⁷

With this severance of sexuality from reproductive needs and the development of "plastic sexuality," Giddens envisages the development of "pure relations" between individuals. These relations of friendship or "confluent love"³⁸ are the most striking and potentially the most liberating aspect of post-Fordist society, since individuals are no longer bound to each other by social and moral obligations, but only by their personal needs and the pleasure which their open sexual relations mutually produces. "Giving certain conditions, the pure relationship can provide a facilitating social environment for the reflexive project of the self."³⁹ Once individuals have established certain rules of conduct, they can deploy their sexuality plastically in mutually pleasurable ways. Giddens is extremely optimistic about the power of the pure relation, and maintains that "the transformation of intimacy, together with plastic sexuality, provides conditions which could bring about a reconciliation of the sexes."⁴⁰ Although Giddens emphasizes the plasticity of sexuality, given the new individual reflexivity and the vast choices available, the individual's entire selfhood becomes plastic. Giddens is extremely optimistic about post-Fordist society. For him, new technological and institutional developments have broken the shackles of tradition and have liberated individuals into a world of choice in which they can freely decide on the ways in which they can lead their lives and interact with others.

37. Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), p. 34: "Reproduction was once part of nature and heterosexual activity was inevitably its focal point. Once sexuality has become an 'integral' component of social relations, as a result of changes already discussed, heterosexuality is no longer a standard by which everything else is judged. We have not yet reached a stage in which heterosexuality is accepted as only one taste among others, but such is the implication of the socialization of reproduction."

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

Against the Later Giddens

(A) *Political Ameliorism*. For the most part, Giddens does not discuss the new conflicts in this emergent social order, but focuses only on individualist issues of personal identity and relations. However, in his latest publications, *Beyond Left and Right* and *The Third Way*, he attempts to address wider political issues and to lay out a program of post-Fordist political reform. He does not always ignore the serious problems which confront contemporary Western politics. He recognizes the current crisis in the public sector and insists on its reform against neo-liberal demands for its abolition. Even when he highlights a serious conflict in post-Fordist society, however, he glosses over the nature and scale of these problems, begging the questions they pose. Thus, he accepts the rightist critiques of the welfare state, that it is undemocratic and restrictive of personal liberties, but insists that “a reformed welfare state . . . has to meet the criteria of social justice, but it has also to recognize and incorporate lifestyle choice, be integrated with ecological strategies and respond to new risk scenarios.”⁴¹ The sentiments behind these reforms are admirable, but in substance his proposals are mere platitudes far too general to have any practical application. Although he sometimes accepts the scale of the problem, his solutions are mere slogans that never seriously address the crisis. The welfare state and the public sector are subject to pressures which are the result of large historical transformations. Reform cannot be achieved by merely being more aware of “lifestyle choices” or trying to be more “entrepreneurial.” The line of transformation will be determined by the wider socio-historical context, and Giddens’ role should be to highlight the kinds of trajectories which that social and historical context imposes on the welfare state. In the absence of such grounded analysis, Giddens consistently plays down the seriousness of the political difficulties inherent in the post-Fordist settlement. In so doing, he presents an overly optimistic description of this society.

This legitimating optimism is particularly obvious when Giddens announces that the collapse of communism demonstrates that Western capitalism is the only feasible economic regime today: “No one any longer has any alternatives to capitalism — the arguments that remain concern how far, and in what ways, capitalism should be governed and

41. Giddens, *The Third Way* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 45. Later, on p. 122, he expands on this: “Benefit systems should be reformed where they induce moral hazard, and a more active risk-taking attitude encouraged, wherever possible through incentives, but where necessary by legal obligations.”

regulated.”⁴² His claim that capitalism is the only way is unobjectionable since, broadly speaking, it simply refers to the fact that, after the collapse of the USSR, appeals to large-scale state-planning have lost credibility. However, he assumes that the nature of this “capitalism” is somehow obvious. As he himself recognizes, however, Western capitalism has undergone a profound transformation since the 1970s. The capitalism Giddens assumes to be the only alternative is, in fact, not the capitalism that has existed for most of the 20th century. He clearly means that post-Fordist, multinational capitalism is the only viable economic system currently possible, which necessarily includes the neoliberal regulative regime. However, he then typically equivocates and insists that what is not decided is how this system should be regulated, though he has, in fact, already accepted that it should be. Beyond some vague ideas about extending dialogical democracy to include personal lifestyles,⁴³ he provides no serious arguments to explain why capitalism is the only viable option. Moreover, by arguing that post-Fordist capitalism, including its regime of regulation, is the only option, he has narrowed the debate over regulation to the smallest possible area. In saying that post-Fordist capitalism requires only peripheral tampering, rather than profound and radical democratization, he supports the *status quo*. He endorses the current consensus between multinationals, states, consumers and citizens, instead of recognizing the democratic deficit and levels of inequality and exploitation in this order.

(B) *The Vindication of the Post-Fordist Individual*. Giddens is eager to differentiate his optimistic descriptions of the post-traditional individual from neoliberal, rational-choice notions of agency. Citing Ulrich Beck, he insists that “the new individualism is ‘not Thatcherism, not market individualism, nor atomization’.”⁴⁴ Although he refuses to accept that his notion of the post-traditional individual has any connection with the neoliberal entrepreneur, his emphasis on the increasingly autonomous individual reflects and vindicates the notion of the individual that is widely drawn upon in political debates. Giddens may differentiate himself from specifically neoliberal notions of the rational individual, but his post-traditional individual echoes dominant notions found in neoliberal discourse.

The affinity between Giddens’ post-traditional individual and dominant post-Fordist notions of agency appear at their starkest when his

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.

43. Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), pp. 12 and 18.

44. Giddens, *The Third Way*, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

descriptions of contemporary subjectivity are counterposed to alternative accounts of contemporary individuality. In his analysis of postmodernity, Frederic Jameson discusses new forms of individuality. He compares Van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes (deliberately chosen because they were the subject of a hermeneutic interpretation by Heidegger) and Andy Warhol's *Diamond Shoes* to demonstrate the difference between the subjectivity of modernity and that which is now becoming dominant. As Heidegger argued, Van Gogh's peasant shoes are part of a whole which they embody and communicate.⁴⁵ The power of Van Gogh's painting lies in the fact that the shoes are embedded in and illuminate the culture that finds these peasant shoes meaningful; the painting does not merely represent the shoes as external objects, but illustrates the meaning peasant culture has within modern culture. For Jameson, the illumination of a tradition by Van Gogh's painting presumes a notion of an authentic subject who is steeped in a tradition and, therefore, the shoes speak to him. The painting points to the cultural understandings that it shares with the viewer. Modernist paintings operate around notions of depth and the search for a higher unity of the subject within a tradition that overcomes the fragmentation and alienation of modernity.⁴⁶

By contrast, Warhol's *Diamond Shoes* serve no such purpose and have no such subject in mind. Warhol's picture is depthless and he "does not speak to us" and "in no way completes the hermeneutic gesture."⁴⁷ Rather, Warhol's painting announces and presupposes a new kind of subject.⁴⁸ With this repudiation of depth goes the transcendence of the subject's alienation in favor of the mere fragmentation of the subject.⁴⁹ The postmodern subject becomes a mere surface on which commodified images play and in which the individual disappears under a pastiche of trivial styles. Instead of being the deepest expression of human individuality, the human body becomes a glossy skin for postmodern fetishization. For Jameson, this fragmentation of the now flattened subject is logically consonant with postmodern capitalism. The fragmentation of the subject widens the forms of consumption in which individuals can now engage, because they are no longer burdened by a sense of authentic selves tied to particular social traditions with others. The flattened subject implied by

45. Frederic Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 6-7.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Warhol's shoes is the appropriate self, unconstrained by emotional or social attachments to a wider tradition.

There are important parallels between Jameson's notion of the post-modern, fragmented subject and Giddens' post-traditional plastic subject. For both, the new form of subjectivity is rendered possible by globalized markets. But this subjectivity also assists in the development of multinational capitalism, which has produced a vast panoply of new commodities. For both Giddens and Jameson, the subject is no longer committed to an authentic life-style through embeddedness in tradition. Subjects no longer find their place in communally meaningful activity but freely indulge in personally and temporally pleasurable activities, like plastic sexuality. For the postmodern, post-traditional subject, meaning is the pleasure provided by consumption. Yet, where Jameson looks critically on the new fragmented and flattened subject as an obliteration of meaning and an incarceration by economic forces, Giddens celebrates this transition as a liberation. While Jameson criticizes contemporary culture, Giddens' later writing celebrates an individuality which echoes dominant notions of the consuming individual and which is only possible within post-Fordist capitalism. By highlighting this putative emancipation, Giddens persistently obscures those exploitative aspects which make that individualistic emancipation possible.

Giddens' blindness toward the political and economic context and, therefore, to relations of power which give rise to the post-traditional individual, is nowhere more clear than in his engagement with Foucault's writings on sexuality. Foucault insists that even the most apparently intimate sexual practices are inevitably contoured by social discourses embodying power: individual sexuality is only constituted through the wider networks of power-knowledge, which make any particular set of intimate relations possible. "We must not make the mistake of thinking that sex is an autonomous agency which secondarily produces manifold effects of sexuality over the entire length of its surface of contact with power. On the contrary, sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations and pleasures."⁵⁰ Giddens rejects this thesis. He claims that Foucault's notion of power as permeating society implies that power is independent of

50. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*, tr.by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 55.

human agency.⁵¹ In point of fact, although Foucault sometimes writes as if power were indeed separate from individual relations, there is little doubt that Foucault intends to ground power in relations: “For let us not deceive ourselves; if we speak of structures of mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others. The term ‘power’ designates relations between partners.”⁵²

Having wrongly accused Foucault of separating power from agency, Giddens returns to the very atomistic and solipsistic account of sex that Foucault’s analysis of sexuality was intended to undermine. Against Foucault’s location of modern sexuality within networks of power relations between individuals, Giddens describes the emergence and transformation of modern sexuality in wholly individualist terms. For Giddens, the development of 19th century bourgeois sexual practices was the outgrowth of personal reflexivity, whereby individuals sought to gain greater control over their lives.⁵³ Individuals sequestered the experience of sex in the private domestic sphere through reflexive attempts to gain control over themselves and their reproduction. The development of contraception was a widespread example of this reflexive project of the self, and Giddens regards the dramatic change in sexual attitudes in the 1960s as the triumph of this emancipating reflexivity. Even the problems modern reflexive individuals face in their sexual practices are personal, indicative of ontological security and existential doubt — “the feeling that one is worthless, one’s life is empty and one’s body is an inadequate device”⁵⁴ — rather than social issues of exclusion, subordination or exploitation. For Giddens, Foucault underplays individual autonomy, and fails to recognize the genuinely emancipatory advances individuals have made, which Giddens persistently attempts to rectify by a rigorously individualistic account of sexuality.

In fact, Giddens’ account of the transformation of sexuality as the growth of individual reflexivity presupposes the very social conditions Foucault highlights. The development of contraception was not primarily the outgrowth of a myriad of personal decisions, but its adoption in the private sphere was the result of wider public debates about sexuality, including the state’s concern with social order and population or, as Foucault puts it, with “bio-power.” Giddens occasionally recognizes that this wider

51. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 and 171-173

52. Michel Foucault, “Afterword: The Subject and Power,” tr. by Leslie Sawyer, in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1982), p. 217.

53. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, *op. cit.*, pp.175-182.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

context is an essential element in the constitution of sexuality. Thus, having argued that the key factor in the development of modern sexuality was individual reflexivity, he reverses his position: "The sequestering of sexuality occurred largely as a result of social rather than psychological repression and concerned two things above all: the confinement or denial of female sexual responsiveness and the generalized acceptance of male sexuality as unproblematic."⁵⁵

Confirming that individual female (and by extension, male) sexuality was constituted by the wider social context and, therefore, by the general distribution of power relations, Giddens concedes that "the repressions of the Victorian era and after were in some respects all too real."⁵⁶ In the end, Giddens' has to draw on the very Foucauldian account of sexuality he putatively rejects, in order to sustain his own flawed theory of individualistically-created sexuality. Given that sexuality has always been constituted through wider social networks, which include elements of power, it is naïve to assume that the transformations of sexual attitudes in the 1960s can be read off as evidence of increasing individual freedom. Like Victorian sexuality, contemporary practices are created by wider social, political and economic networks. To claim that current sexual practices simply free the individual is to legitimate those institutions which have, if anything, overtaken the state in their documentation and discussion of all manner of sexual performance.

Giddens never seriously considers the implications of the socio-historical construction of intimacy, but sees it as a secluded lagoon which has silted itself off from the political and social context. Even when he sees the connection, he typically fails to recognize its import. Indeed, he goes to some length to disconnect contemporary sexual practices from wider social and economic circumstances. Thus, Giddens dismisses the link between sexuality and the market, because "there is plenty of evidence that sexuality is worrying, disturbing, fraught with tensions. Pleasure is hedged about with too many countervailing tendencies to make plausible the idea that sexuality forms the centerpoint of a hedonistic consumer society."⁵⁷ While sexuality can stimulate feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, the claim that sexuality is too disturbing to be central to consumer society is contradicted by Giddens' counterclaim in the preceding paragraph that, "sexuality generates pleasure; and pleasure, or at least

55. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-8.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-7.

the promise of it, provides a leverage for marketing goods in capitalistic society. Sexual imagery appears almost everywhere in the marketplace as a sort of gigantic selling ploy.”⁵⁸ The celebratory use of such sexual imagery in advertising campaigns does not preclude personal anxieties about sex. But these images trade on ideal notions of sexual performance and gratification, and their message is that the consumer’s sexual insecurities will be erased by the purchase of some particular commodity. Once again, Giddens accepts at one moment what he rejects at another. He recognizes that any contemporary form of intimacy is bound up with the wider context, but he consistently and paradoxically denies this fact and insists that personal sexuality can be devolved from wider economic flows. In this, his vindication of the post-Fordist individual echoes his political ameliorism, for he inevitably fails to consider the implications of the social realities that he fleetingly recognizes.

Although Giddens generally disconnects the post-traditional individual from the system, in his later writing he occasionally recognizes that there is a direct link between individual choice and wider global markets. At these moments, however, his vindication of the post-Fordist era is not called into question. On the contrary, since the system facilitates the development of lagoons of personal pleasure, the system is seen as unproblematically liberating. The post-traditional individual is, at certain moments, seen as not only the product of globalization, but also essential to the reproduction of the system in typical structurationist fashion. Consequently, Giddens argues that “the overriding stress of the book [*Modernity and Self-Identity*] is on the emergence of new mechanisms of self-identity which are shaped by — yet also shape — the institutions of modernity.”⁵⁹ The post-traditional individual adopts practices appropriate to wider institutional realities and simultaneously reproduces the very systems that were the medium of action in the first place. The emancipatory potential of post-Fordism is unproblematically tied to the reproduction of its political-economic structure. The liberated individual now reproduces a system that thrives on the emancipation of the plastic individual.

This is not to deny that certain forms of freedom and fulfillment are possible within post-Fordist society, as they are in any social form. But Giddens persistently underemphasizes the intense political and economic struggles in favor of a celebration of private, sexual relations. By highlighting the putative development of new forms of private freedom, where individuals

58. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

can always do otherwise, he becomes the key apologist for post-Fordist modes of domination. Consequently, Nietzsche's rejection of the "the whole of sociology in England and France" a century ago "because it knows from experience only the decaying forms of society and takes its own decaying instincts with perfect innocence as the norm of sociological value judgement"⁶⁰ is still valid for Giddens today. Given his Parsonesque prominence on the international academic stage, such facile vindication of contemporary social life marks a serious and widespread retreat from critique.

Conclusion

Giddens' later writings are inseparable from the social order he seeks to analyze. They are not so much a critical analysis of post-Fordist regimes as their vindication, for even when he identifies the central conflicts in this society, he fails to recognize their import. In particular, he normalizes the idea of the individual as a freely choosing agent, which is a central motif in contemporary culture. It would be equally reprehensible to go the other way, as some Marxists do, and insist that post-Fordism is an essentially exploitative order systematically denying all individual fulfillment. This makes a mockery of the widespread consent this social form has commanded. However, it is also necessary to recognize when theories become part of the social reality they describe, and uncritically support the values of the historical period of which they are a product.

As Gadamer has argued, it may be impossible to transcend one's historical conditions, and all that can be achieved through a fusion of horizons is an effective historical consciousness.⁶¹ Yet, by demonstrating the unrecognized link between Giddens' later writings and the historical period in which he writes, it may be possible to provide a more self-conscious and historically-aware account, even though it will not transcend all historical prejudices. Ironically, Giddens' later writings fail to perform the very role of reflexive self-criticism he marks out as the distinguishing feature of "post-traditional culture." They do not question the social order which gives rise to them, but unintentionally reproduce the very traditions of which they are a part. Giddens has become one of those guardians of the truth and tradition that reflexive modernization has rendered obsolete.

60. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, tr. by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 91.

61. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, tr. by Garrett Barden and Johan Cumming (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), p. 273.